

# On The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

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The concerted effort now being made to stimulate educational change through the establishment of research and development organizations is a phenomenon of fairly recent origin. For many years previous to the emergence of these centers, laboratories, and other organizations, members of university faculties of education had been carrying out research studies, and some faculties and colleges of education had small research units attached to them. In Canada, the research done through such agencies was generally on a rather modest scale, tended to reflect the interests of individual researchers, and generally did not exercise a strong influence on either the teachers or the curriculum in the school systems. This is not to say that the research was poor or irrelevant; however, its inability to lead to changes on a broad scale underlined the need to combine research with development and thus to forge a strong link between theory and practice. Although educators had long recognized this need, it was not until the past half dozen years that they had access to sufficient funds to construct organizations to answer it. Then, of course, they came face to face with the challenging task of devising the right model.

## **Establishment of the Institute**

Creation in 1965 of The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education represented an attempt by the Ontario Minister of Education William Davis and his advisors to construct the most effective model, not only to ally educational research with development, but also to associate both these activities with graduate study in education. To the best of my knowledge, we at the Institute are treading on new ground; it is still too early to tell whether we have acted with the wisdom of angels. If I may judge from my experience in Warsaw last September at the International Conference for the Improvement of Educational Research, no country has fully developed a reliable pattern for educational change. However, after studying systems devised elsewhere, I am convinced that the pattern we are establishing at the Institute holds the greatest promise for success.

The research and development approach, of course, has been employed with great success in other fields. Perhaps an outline of its method of operation in one of those fields will illustrate how we hope it will work in education. Agriculture offers us a good example. Research stations are set up where agricultural scientists can bring together knowledge derived from basic research in plant genetics, chemistry, and other fields

related to agriculture. This knowledge provides the basis for development of a design or product, such as a new variety of commercial crop. The product is then field-tested on experimental farms to determine how it will grow under a variety of soil conditions, fertilizers, climates, and methods of cultivation. If the tests are successful, district agricultural representatives encourage local farmers to demonstrate the product on their farms. The representatives then continue to offer advice on cultivation and harvesting of the new crop, and report on new developments and improvements.

Research and development in education proceed in a similar manner. For example, the Institute has gathered academic staff representing many fields of study related to education: historians and philosophers of education, psychologists, sociologists, specialists in computer applications and testing, educational planners, and many more. Their studies are aimed at an understanding of the principles that underlie educational practice, as those of the agricultural scientists are focused on sciences fundamental to successful agriculture. Just as the success of a wheat crop depends on the knowledge of the farmer as well as on his skill, the success of the teaching in our schools depends on the knowledge of the teacher as well as on his art. Our efforts are aimed at providing the educator with new knowledge that will enable him to refine his art and pursue it with greater effect.

Although the Institute is a new structure, its components were thoroughly tried and proven organizations of merit. In July 1965 the Department of Educational Research and the Department of Graduate Studies, both of the Ontario College of Education, University of Toronto, were brought together to form OISE. One year later a merger was effected with the Ontario Curriculum Institute, which had been founded in 1963 to undertake programs of curriculum development; the Curriculum Institute was a "grass roots" movement of teachers and officials from all levels of Ontario's educational system. The result of these mergers is an educational body unique in its combination of the separate but related functions of research, development, and graduate studies. Wherever possible, the Institute's graduate students take part in the research and development projects: one of the most effective ways of circulating fresh ideas is to bring students into what we hope is a stimulating atmosphere so that upon graduation they will be equipped to assume positions where their spirit of innovation can benefit our schools.

### Objectives and Structure

The specific objectives of the Institute are to study matters and problems relating to or affecting education, to disseminate the results of the findings of educational studies, and to assist in the implementation of the findings when requested to do so. The Institute has also been charged with the responsibility of establishing and conducting courses leading to certificates of standing and graduate degrees in education and of providing instruction as well through seminars, workshops, publications, and demonstrations of our programs.

The Institute was established as a college under an independent Board of Governors, incorporated by a special Act of the provincial Legislature. Our Board consists of representatives of all levels of the school system: teachers, school trustees, university personnel, teacher educators, staff members of the Ontario Department of Education, school administrators, and members of our own staff. To accommodate others interested in serving education, we have a membership category defined simply as "residents of Ontario." With so broad a composition, the Board can bring to the Institute a wealth of knowledge and experience of the provincial school system, and facilitate cooperation and communication between the Institute and the various sectors of the province's educational community.

Provision was made in the Act for the establishment of an Academic Council, comprising all members of academic staff, the chief librarian, and the editor-in-chief. The Council enables the faculty to discuss policy thoroughly and present recommendations to the Board, and serves as a means whereby the faculty can exercise a strong influence on the growth and direction of the Institute. At present the Council has powers of recommendation only; however, the entire governing structure of the Institute has recently been reviewed by two committees, one of staff and one of the Board, and recommendations for a bicameral system of a Board and a Senate are now receiving careful study.

The Institute is organized into ten departments, each carrying out programs of research, development, and graduate study. The departments include: Adult Education, Educational Administration, Computer Applications, Curriculum, History and Philosophy, Measurement and Evaluation, Educational Planning, Applied Psychology, Special Education, and Sociology in Education. To strengthen our interdisciplinary approach, we have appointed officials to coordinate the three basic activities of the Institute; these coordinators

draw on varied skills and resources within the departments and within other universities and our school systems, in order to subject problems in education to a thorough and comprehensive review. A total of 375 research studies has been launched since 1965, and at present there are about 200 studies in progress. Development projects, which are ventures on a much larger scale, now total about 50. The trend at the Institute is more and more toward interdisciplinary pursuits and toward combining small, related research studies into larger ones and linking these to development projects. In this way practical programs can incorporate the latest research findings.

### Graduate Studies

Although the Institute has the right to grant its own degrees, it has entered into an affiliation agreement with the University of Toronto for the purpose of graduate instruction, and in effect constitutes the Department of Educational Theory of the University's School of Graduate Studies. The affiliation provides both the faculty and the students of OISE with access to the extensive human and physical resources of the University, resources in a wide variety of disciplines bearing upon education. The Institute now attracts about 2,300 persons annually to full-time and part-time study during the academic year and in summer. It offers more than 200 specialized courses leading to the degrees of Master of Education, Master of Arts, and Doctor of Philosophy. Enrollment has increased each year; in 1968 one in six postgraduate degrees granted by the University of Toronto was in education.

In the past, Ontario has experienced a severe shortage of educators with advanced knowledge in specialized fields; prospective students had to leave the province to find the courses and programs they wished to pursue, and all too often did not return. The Institute now is able to provide staff and resources on a far greater scale than previously existed, and has thus made possible the establishment of courses in more than a dozen fields, ranging from school administration and student counseling to such relatively new areas of study as educational planning and adult education. In most of the specialized fields of study, balanced programs are available at both the master's and doctoral levels. The Institute also provides in-service training for practicing educators through workshops and seminars, and has established a certificate program for mature persons working in adult education.

### **Research and Development Studies**

The Institute conducts a wide range of studies in an attempt to add to the store of knowledge about how children learn and how educational programs can be best devised. Studies originate with individual staff members, or teams, or as a department project, and in numerous instances are undertaken in cooperation with outside agencies. In one sense, responsibility for a study rests with the department concerned, as a budget unit, but coordination and some control are exercised on an Institute-wide basis. Advice and guidance on the research and development programs, for instance, are secured from the Research Advisory Committee and the Development Advisory Committee respectively (which include representatives of the staff, the Board, and some external organizations). In regard to special studies or projects, however, an assessment is made by the Research Review Board or Development Review Board; these are internal bodies composed of staff members only. An external assessment of a project outline might occasionally be secured. Criteria and guidelines, as well as procedures and types of boards, were proposed by the staff through the Academic Council.

Discussions held over the past year indicated that the general pattern for our future operations will consist in the design and conduct of large-scale, interdisciplinary projects. While the departments will remain the basic units of the Institute, a superstructure will be imposed upon them that will permit and facilitate the operation of wide-ranging studies crossing departmental boundaries. Since these studies will differ markedly in nature and in duration, new types of operating units will have to be invented. These may be project teams with members from various departments or seconded from school systems or other universities, assembled for a short period of time to conduct a highly specific study. At the other end of the spectrum may be a unit of a continuing nature conducting longitudinal studies over many years. The common feature of these new projects will be their thematic approach, characterized by a focus on a broad topic or area of interest and a study encompassing the many variables and aspects of major problems and the interrelationships of these variables. This approach stands in sharp contrast to the traditional research approach in which attention is confined to a single variable, or a very few, within a complex situation and the remaining factors are held constant throughout the experiment. In a substantial

number of large-scale projects, however, the design will incorporate the findings of a number of related experimental studies of the traditional type. The impetus for this new approach is a clear recognition that educational problems are generally extremely complex and thus do not lend themselves to solution by the traditional research approach.

### **Field Development**

Enlisting the support and cooperation of others in identifying problems, devising methods of solution, and providing the financial and human resources needed depend in part on effective communication. It is the policy of the Institute to seek involvement with teachers and education officials and to persuade them to be more responsive, so that knowledge arising from basic studies will lead to changes in curricula and teaching practices within a reasonable length of time. We are concentrating more and more of our efforts on improving the diffusion process—including dissemination and assistance in implementation—through publications and through in-service training in workshops and seminars.

In order to extend the services of the Institute to all parts of Ontario, we are establishing a network of Regional Development Centres; three were inaugurated in July 1969, two more are planned for 1970-71, and an eventual total of ten is contemplated. The Centres are designed primarily to serve the particular educational needs of their regions, to bring about a closer working relationship between local educators and the Institute, and to assist local education agencies and personnel in solving their own problems. The emphasis of activities in any one region served by a Centre might fall on either research and development or graduate studies, or both, depending on the needs defined.

The benefits of the Centres will flow two ways—to the region involved and to the Institute. The region's teachers and school officials will receive help in analyzing their needs and seeking answers to them. The staff of the Centres will provide consultative assistance to local organizations, and keep them informed of the innovative projects under way at OISE. In return, the regions can provide the Institute with information about problem areas that require investigation, enlist cooperating schools for field trials of new methods and materials, and provide dissemination centers and, occasionally, staff for specific projects.

The Coordinator of Field Development, through this system of regional offices and through personal as-

sociation with leading educators throughout the province, keeps his colleagues in the Institute informed of the nature and extent of the needs experienced in the field. He arranges demonstrations and field trials of materials and techniques developed at the Institute, collects information on studies and findings in other jurisdictions, and evaluates the usefulness of these for Ontario schools. In conjunction with his staff, he attempts to involve in the process of educational change all those concerned with the operation of our schools. It has been our experience that without this personal contact and close involvement, new ideas about education tend to lie buried for years in books or journals before they are discovered and eventually put into practice.

Considerable time, perhaps many years, may pass before the research and development efforts at OISE and elsewhere yield anything approximating spectacular results. But such results have come in other fields, and we can expect them to occur in education—but not right away. It takes time, sustained effort, and great resources to produce the necessary information, develop the new techniques, and prepare teachers to make effective use of our findings. Indeed, it will take a great deal of experimentation before we are able to refine and strengthen our own methods of stimulating educational change.

The path of the innovator is seldom smooth. Above all else, he needs the support of the leaders in his field who have the wisdom and the courage to make changes where these are necessary and to back the innovation even when this course of action may seem at first sight to be unpopular. I think, however, that resistance to new educational ideas is not so stubborn as it once was. Parents and teachers are beginning to realize that in these days of rapid social, economic, and technological change, much depends upon the quality of our system of education and its ability to meet new changes successfully. They are beginning to see the futility of awaiting natural evolutionary processes and the necessity of incorporating into the educational system a means whereby the system is continually evaluated and suitable changes are proposed. This is what I like to believe the Institute represents: a center of innovation, moving swiftly but carefully from discovery through development and evaluation to implementation.

### About the Author

Dr. R. W. B. Jackson is Director of The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and Secretary-Treasurer of its Board of Governors.

Dr. Jackson was born and educated in Alberta. He attended Normal School in Calgary, and taught public school for two years before enrolling in the University of Alberta. After completing a BA program in Honors Mathematics, he went to the University of London, England, where he obtained a PhD in Statistics.

After graduation from the University of London, Dr. Jackson worked with the Colonial Office and the London Institute of Education. In 1939 he returned to Canada to join the Department of Educational Research, Ontario College of Education, University of Toronto. He became Assistant Director in 1947 and Director ten years later. When The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education was founded in 1965, Dr. Jackson was appointed its Director.

During his career, Dr. Jackson has received many honors and awards, and is a member of numerous professional associations and committees. One of his most important achievements was as Secretary of the Royal Commission on Education in Ontario (the Hope Commission) from 1945 to 1950. Dr. Jackson is a Fellow of the Royal Statistical Society (England) and a Fellow of the College of Preceptors (England). In 1968 he was awarded an honorary LLD degree from the University of Alberta.

Dr. Jackson has published extensively on educational research and statistics, and is the author of two widely used college textbooks on statistics.

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